

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

LISTING OF CLAIMS:

Claim 1 (Currently Amended): Method for preserving mushrooms, comprising:

(a) contacting the mushrooms with a first aqueous solution comprising a pH-adjusting agent effective to adjust the pH of the first aqueous solution to about 1.5 to 4.5, wherein the pH-adjusting agent comprises citric acid, wherein the contact between the mushrooms and the first aqueous solution is effective to reduce a microbial concentration on the mushrooms, and wherein the mushrooms are contacted with the first aqueous solution for about 15 to 45 ~~[[60]]~~ seconds, and

(b) contacting the mushrooms with a second aqueous solution comprising a chelating agent and an antioxidant, wherein the second aqueous solution has a pH of about 7.0 to 9.0, wherein the mushrooms are contacted with the second aqueous solution for about 15 to 45 seconds,

wherein the mushrooms are contacted with the second aqueous solution after being contacted with the first aqueous solution, and

wherein the mushrooms are continuously transported through a first treatment area in which step (a) is conducted, and a second treatment area in which step (b) is conducted.

Claim 2 (Canceled)

Claim 3 (Previously Presented): Method for preserving mushrooms according to claim 1, wherein the mushrooms are whole mushrooms, sliced mushrooms or mixtures thereof.

Claim 4 (Previously Presented): Method for preserving mushrooms according to claim 1, wherein the mushrooms are rinsed with water before contacting the mushrooms with the first aqueous solution.

Claim 5 (Previously Presented): Method for preserving mushrooms according to claim 1, wherein the first aqueous solution has a pH of about 2.0 to 3.0.

Claim 6 (Previously Presented): Method for preserving mushrooms according to claim 5, wherein the first aqueous solution has a pH of about 2.2 to 2.6.

Claim 7 (Currently Amended): Method for preserving mushrooms according to claim 1, wherein the pH-adjusting agent further comprises ~~citric acid~~, ascorbic acid, erythorbic acid, acetic acid, lactic acid, malic acid or mixtures thereof.

Claim 8 (Canceled)

Claim 9 (Previously Presented): Method for preserving mushrooms according to claim 1, wherein the first aqueous solution comprises sodium chloride in an amount of about 0.1 to 2.0% by weight.

Claim 10 (Previously Presented): Method for preserving mushrooms according to claim 1, wherein the first aqueous solution comprises sodium erythorbate in an amount of about 0.1 to 5.0% by weight.

Claims 11 and 12 (Canceled)

Claim 13 (Previously Presented): Method for preserving mushrooms according to claim 1, wherein the mushrooms are contacted with the first aqueous solution for about 30 to 45 seconds.

Claim 14 (Previously Presented): Method for preserving mushrooms according to claim 1, wherein the mushrooms are rinsed with water after step (a) and before step (b), and wherein the mushrooms are rinsed with water after step (b).

Claim 15 (Previously Presented): Method for preserving mushrooms according to claim 1, wherein the second aqueous solution comprises a high-pH adjusting agent comprising sodium bicarbonate, sodium erythorbate, sodium carbonate, sodium citrate, sodium hydroxide, sodium lactate, sodium hypophosphite, sodium acetate, potassium bicarbonate, potassium carbonate, potassium citrate, potassium hydroxide or mixtures thereof.

Claim 16 (Previously Presented): Method for preserving mushrooms according to claim 15, wherein the second aqueous solution comprises sodium bicarbonate in an amount of about 0.1 to 5.0% by weight.

Claim 17 (Previously Presented): Method for preserving mushrooms according to claim 1, wherein the antioxidant comprises sodium erythorbate, ascorbic acid or mixtures thereof.

Claim 18 (Previously Presented): Method for preserving mushrooms according to claim 1, wherein the antioxidant is present in an amount of about 0.1 to 10.0% by weight.

Claim 19 (Previously Presented): Method for preserving mushrooms according to claim 1, wherein the chelating agent comprises calcium-disodium EDTA, disodium EDTA or mixtures thereof.

Claim 20 (Previously Presented): Method for preserving mushrooms according to claim 1, wherein the chelating agent is present in an amount of about 0.01 to 5.0% by weight.

Claims 21 and 22 (Canceled)

Claim 23 (Currently Amended): Method for preserving mushrooms according to claim 1, wherein the mushrooms are contacted with the second aqueous solution for about 30 to 45 seconds.

Claim 24 (Previously Presented): Method for preserving mushrooms according to claim 1, wherein the second aqueous solution has a pH of about 7.5 to 8.5.

Claim 25 (Previously Presented): Method for preserving mushrooms according to claim 24, wherein the second aqueous solution has a pH of about 7.8 to 8.2.

Claim 26 (Previously Presented): Method for preserving mushrooms according to claim 1, further comprising:

(c) blowing air over the mushrooms to evaporate an amount of water present on the mushrooms, wherein step (c) is conducted after step (b).

Claim 27 (Previously Presented): Method for preserving mushrooms according to claim 1, wherein the step (b) is effective to raise the pH at the surface of the mushrooms to a pH of 6.2 to 6.8.

Claim 28 (Previously Presented): Method for preserving mushrooms according to claim 1, wherein the mushrooms are not contacted with an aqueous solution having a pH greater than 7.0 prior to the step (a).

Claim 29 (Currently Amended): Method for preserving mushrooms, comprising:

(a) contacting the mushrooms with a first aqueous solution comprising a pH-adjusting agent effective to adjust the pH of the first aqueous solution to about 1.5 to 4.5, wherein the pH-adjusting agent comprises citric acid, wherein the contact between the mushrooms and the first aqueous solution is effective to reduce a microbial concentration on the mushrooms, and wherein the mushrooms are contacted with the first aqueous solution for about 15 to 45 ~~[[60]]~~ seconds, and

(b) contacting the mushrooms with a second aqueous solution comprising:

(i) a chelating agent selected from the group consisting of calcium-disodium EDTA, disodium EDTA and a mixture thereof; and

(ii) an antioxidant selected from the group consisting of sodium erythorbate, ascorbic acid and a mixture thereof,

wherein the second aqueous solution has a pH of about 7.0 to 9.0, and wherein the mushrooms are contacted with the second aqueous solution for about 15 to 45 seconds,

wherein the mushrooms are contacted with the second aqueous solution after being contacted with the first aqueous solution, and

wherein the mushrooms are continuously transported through a first treatment area in which step (a) is conducted, and a second treatment area in which step (b) is conducted.

Claim 30 (Previously Presented): Method for preserving mushrooms according to claim 29, wherein the mushrooms are not contacted with an aqueous solution having a pH greater than 7.0 prior to the step (a).

Claim 31 (Previously Presented): Method for preserving mushrooms according to claim 29, wherein the pH of the first aqueous solution is about 2.2 to 2.6, and the pH of the second aqueous solution is about 7.8 to 8.2.

Claim 32 (Previously Presented): Method for preserving mushrooms according to claim 1, wherein the first and second aqueous solutions are contacted with the mushrooms by spraying the solutions.

Claim 33 (Previously Presented): Method for preserving mushrooms according to claim 29, wherein the first and second aqueous solutions are contacted with the mushrooms by spraying the solutions.